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FISHERIES OF VENEZUELA, 1970—71

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INTRODUCTION

The 1971 Venezuelan fisheries catch was 138,900 metric tons valued at US$28,862,000. This is an increase of 10 percent in quantity, but a 12-percent decrease in value when compared with the 1970 catch of 126,400 tons worth $33 million. Shrimp landings of 9,400 tons were the most valuable, accounting for $10.7 million.

During 1970-71, the Government and industry worked together to develop and expand the fisheries of Venezuela. To achieve their goals, they concentrated on developing new fishing ports, enlarging the fleet, and building new processing facilities. The Venezuelan Government was particularly interested in developing the underutilized resources at the mouth of the Orinoco River in the eastern region.

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Both the Venezuelan Government and the fishing industry are seeking to increase and diversify the number of seafood products available for local consumption and export. To achieve this goal, they are expanding their fishing ports, fleets, and processing facilities. New investments are being concentrated in the two most productive fishing regions in the northwest (states of Zulia and Falcon) and in the northeast (state of Sucre).

Ports:

The new, $10.5-million fishing port of Guiria in eastern Venezuela--across from neighboring Port-of-Spain, Trinidad --was inaugurated in June 1972. The port was designed to attract large fishing vessels, with the expectation that they would fish the rich waters around the mouth of the Orinoco River. The port includes over 500,000 square meters of protected water, eight docks, an ice plant, a dry-dock, cold-storage, and service facilities. A 2,500-ton packing plant with freezer-storage and ship repair facilities will be completed during the next stage of construction.

In addition to this port, a new dock and ice plant are being built by the Venezuelan Development Corporation at Punto Fijo, on the Paraguana Peninsula. Finally, the Development Corporation of the state of Zulia plans to construct a new fishing port on Lake Maracaibo.

Vessels:

The port expansion program is being accompanied by a rapid increase in vessel construction, primarily in medium-to-large vessels. The build-up of the fleet will increase the size of the shrimp fleet at Punto Fijo (in the Gulf of Venezuela) from 119 vessels in 1969 to around 150 vessels in 1972; 20 to 50 additional trawlers are expected to join that fleet in 1973. Vessels are also being constructed for the fleet based at the Port of Guiria where the Ministry of Agriculture has begun building 30 fishing trawlers, each 15 meters in length, for use by low-income fishermen and cooperatives. Construction of 22-meter vessels is expected to begin in 1973.

Processing Facilities:

The development of Venezuela's fisheries has been spurred by the addition of several new processing plants in the past few years. The newest and largest Venezuelan processor and exporter of shrimp is the Associacion Venezolana Camaronera, S.A. (AVENCASA) at Punto Fijo; AVENCASA was established in 1968 by independent boat owners who, although residing in Punto Fijo, had previously unloaded their catches in Maracaibo for processing. The cooperative now has 130 shrimp vessels averaging 150 tons each and employs 480 workers. AVENCASA's annual sales for 1970 were US$10.3 million.

Several other processing plants were also established in 1967-68. They include Frigomar in Maracaibo, Pesca S.A. in Maracaibo, and Productos del Mar in Punto Fijo; all process shrimp and crabs. Vichar de Coche on Margarita was also established in 1968; this firm processes fish meal and cans sardines.

Establishment of these firms has resulted in the closing of some other firms. Several companies have stopped operations, primarily because of mismanagement and overexpansion; others were affected by the establishment of AVENCASA. In the long run, however, these new companies should increase fishery sales through greater efficiency and service.

CATCH

The Venezuelan fisheries catch has shown a steady long-term increase marked by short-term fluctuations over the past two decades. Figure 1 shows this growth.

Sardines:

Sardines are Venezuela's most abundant species, with landings averaging around 40,000 tons per year. The 1971 catch of Spanish sardines (Sardinella anchovia) was 44,300 tons. They were mainly caught along the southeastern coast of the island of Margarita, the northern coast of the Araya Peninsula, and off the coast of the state of Sucre (fig. 2). The Venezuelans also caught 9,100 tons of Atlantic thread herring and 3,400 tons of anchovies. The combined catch of sardines, thread herring, and anchovies, totaling 56,800 tons, was valued at US$920,000. Most of this catch was either canned or reduced to fish meal.

Shrimp:

Although sardines are the most abundant species, shrimp is the most valuable. In 1971 some 9,400 tons of shrimp valued at US$10.7 million were caught.

Shrimp are caught by the Maracaibo and Punto Fijo fleets in the Gulf of Venezuela (fig. 2). The Punto Fijo fleet generally harvests brown shrimp (Penaeus aztecus, P. duorarum, and P. brasiliensis), while the Maracaibo fleet tends to harvest white shrimp (P. schmitti). Apparently the white shrimp constitutes one stock; the juveniles are found in Lake Maracaibo and adults in the Gulf of Venezuela. The brown shrimp apparently spend their entire life cycle in the Gulf. Fishing effort (1965-71) and total catch have both increased during the past 7 years, but the catch per unit of effort has decreased during that period, from 420 kg to 160 kg per day for white shrimp and from 170 kg to 130 kg per day for brown shrimp. The Chamber of Commerce of Carirubana, Punto Fijo, the home of

the major shrimping fleet and site of most of the processing plants, has asked for some controls on shrimping in the Gulf of Venezuela. The development of the port facilities in eastern Venezuela is expected to draw some shrimpers away from this heavily fished region to different waters.1/

Tuna:

Venezuela's 1971 tuna catch totaled 8,000 tons valued at US$3.3 million. This fishery began in the late 1950's and relies heavily on yellowfin tuna, which normally accounts for 70 percent of all tuna landings. Albacore (25 percent) and bigeye (5 percent) generally account for the rest of the tuna catch; small catches of black and bluefin tuna are made occasionally. Skipjack has also been caught on occasion, but the Venezuelan market is not yet willing to accept this species. About 70 percent of Venezuela's tuna catch is landed along the northeastern coast where it is sold to canneries. The rest is landed at La Guaira for the fresh-fish market in Caracas.

In mid-1972 several foreign vessels (unidentified) fished for tuna along the northeast coast of Venezuela, with the permission of the National Fisheries Office, and reported catching 463 tons of yellowfin and 120 tons of skipjack.

Other Fish:

A sizable amount of fish is landed in Lake Maracaibo and along the 1,750-mile coastline of Venezuela. Various species of redfish, including grunts and croakers, accounted for 25,600 tons valued at US$6.8 million. Landings of jacks, mullets, scads, moonfish, and other species were 10,800 tons worth $2.4 million. Mackerel landings were 1,900 tons worth $271,000.

Landings of freshwater fish, including catfish and lake corvinas, were 14,600 tons valued at US$2.0 million.

The shrimp fleet or the growing trawl fleet makes most of the catches. The trawl fleet began operations in 1960, with two or three vessels fishing. In 1966 the number of vessels in this fishery began increasing. By 1971 a total of 60 vessels were engaged in trawling. The two main bases for the Venezuelan trawl fleet are Cumana and Puerto La Cruz. The Cumana fleet generally prefers to fish the waters around the island of Margarita, whereas the Puerto La Cruz fleet fishes along the coasts of Anzoategui and Miranda states.

1/ Additional information on the shrimp fisheries of Venezuela can be found in George B. Gross' report, "Shrimp Industry of Central America, Caribbean Sea, and Northern South America," National Marine Fisheries Service, Foreign Fisheries Leaflet No. 73-1, pp. 31-34, January 1973.

Mollusks and Crustaceans:

Until 1957 the catch of "pepitona" (Arca zebra or ark shell) did not exceed 600 tons (unshucked). This fishery has grown steadily, and Venezuela now ranks as the number one producer of ark shell in the world. The 1971 harvest was estimated 4,130 tons by Venezuelan officials. Most of this production comes from the island of Margarita and from the northeastern coast of the island of Cubagua. The normal catch rate is about 1,000 kg. per hour of dredging.

Lobster, oyster, scallops, clams, crabs, and mussels are also harvested by Venezuelan fishermen, but these resources appear to be fished near their maximum sustainable yield and Venezuelan authorities are concerned about the future growth of these fisheries.

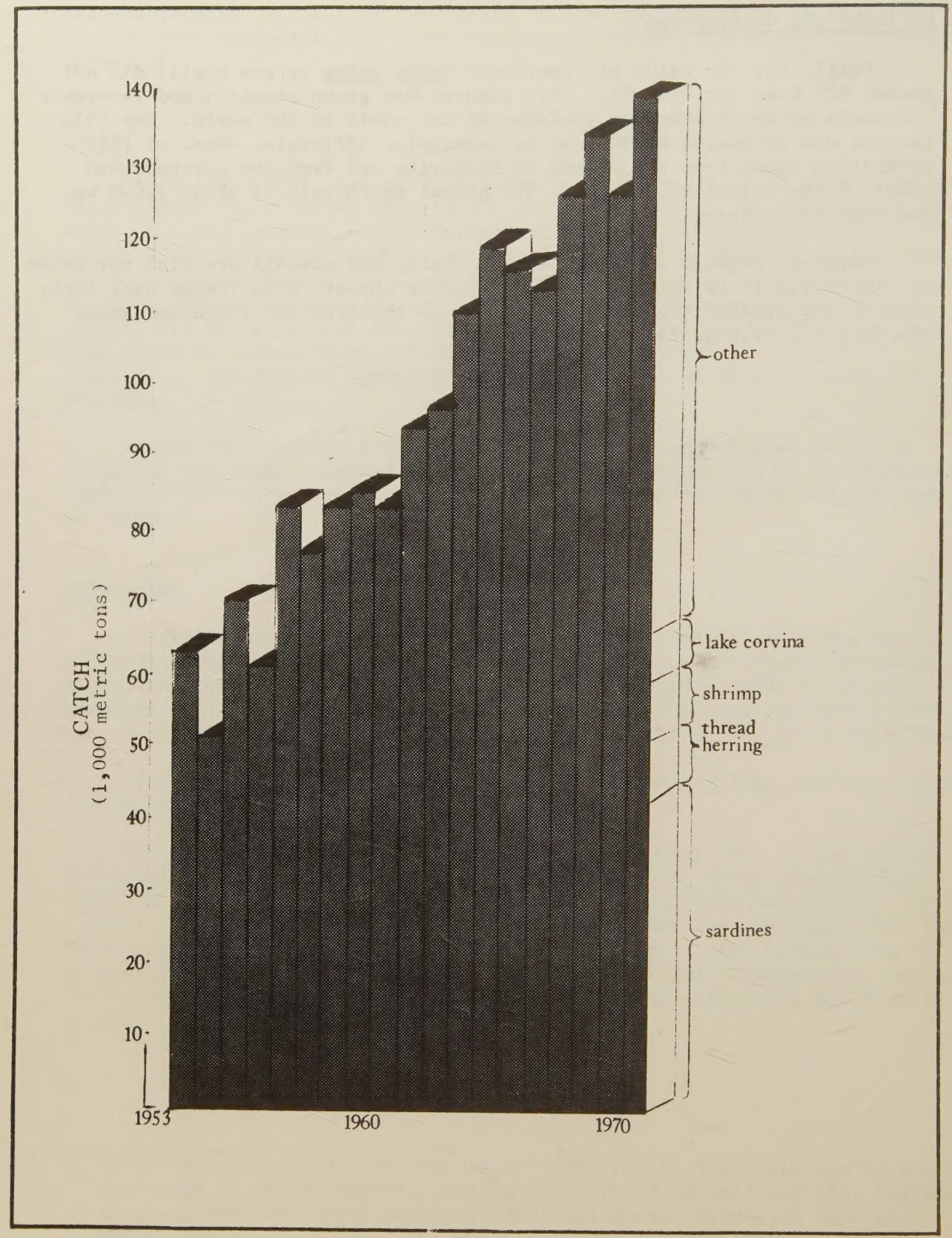

Figure 1.--Venezuela's catch, 1953-71.

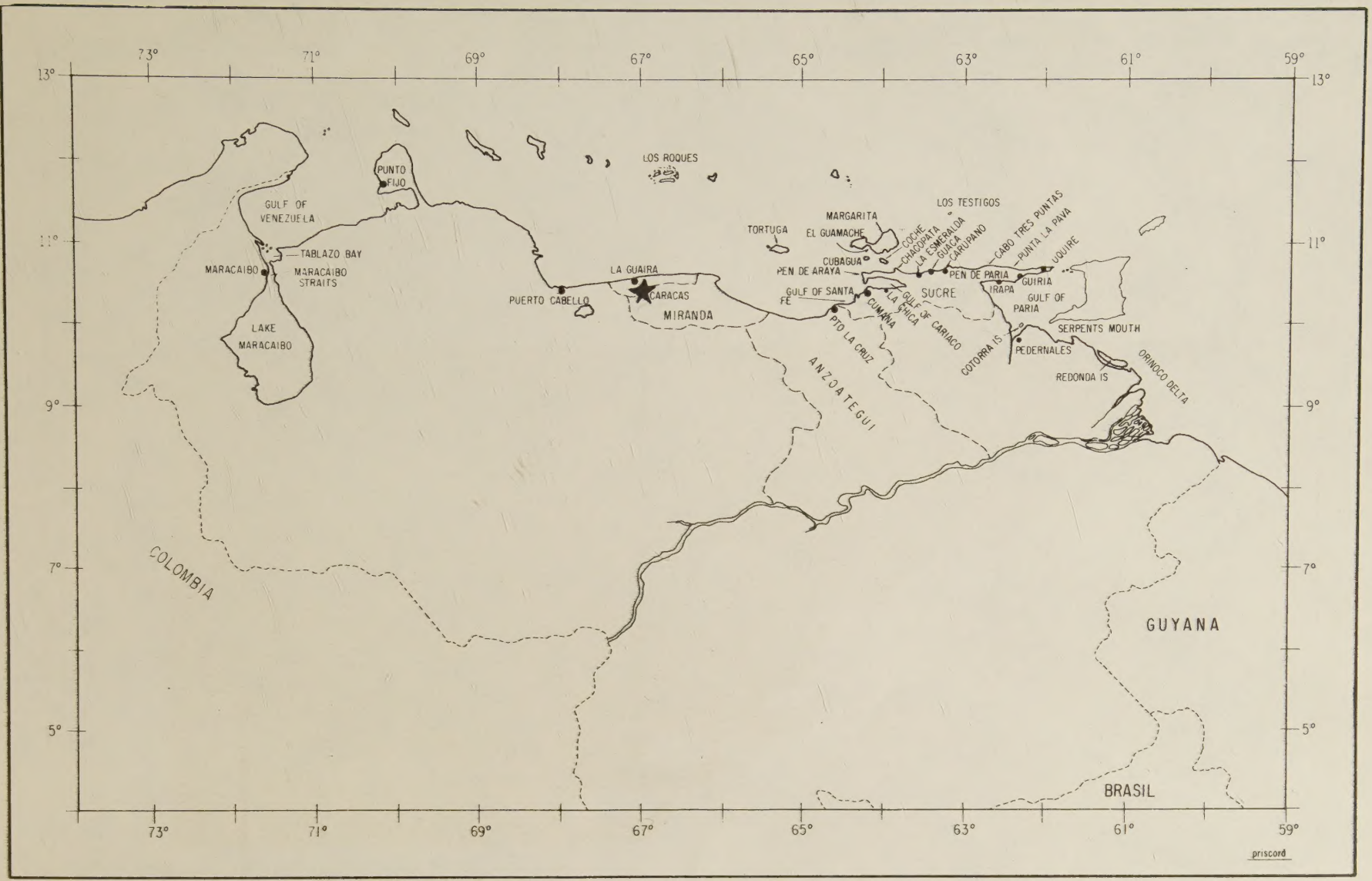

Figure 2.--Map of Venezuela.